

## FIGHT FOR THE FLAG.

Battle for the State League Pennant to Commence Next Thursday.

## TEAMS HAVE ALL STRENGTHENED

The Bluebirds Have Made No Claims, But They Are in the Race, and Expect to Win—Work of Other Clubs.

The season of 1896 in the Virginia State League begins next Thursday when the Richmond team will meet the Roanoke Giants at West-End Park, and for five months thereafter the six clubs composing the league will battle manfully and heroically for supremacy and the pennant.

The season promises to be one of the most interesting and exciting in the history of baseball in this State. Last season the Virginia league was conceded to be the fastest State combination ever in existence, and it rivalled many of the larger minor leagues.

There can be no doubt that it is stronger to-day than it was at this time last year, as is evidenced by the games played by the local clubs with National League teams. Last season the Virginia teams were soft snags for the big leaguers; this season it is different. The boys of the National League have had their hands full ever since they have been in this State, and in no city in Virginia have they had a walk-over.

ALL THE CLUBS STRONG.

Lefty Marr is credited with having gotten together a well-balanced team, which will be under his management, place Portsmouth in the front rank in the race



JESS TANNERHILL.

For the pennant. Marr is a player of vast experience, and no doubt he will be a great deal toward making the season of 1896 a successful one both for Portsmouth and the Virginia State League.

McFarlan, who will lead on to battle the Norfolk club, although a young player, is considered a great hustler, and he has created the impression that he will be strictly in it when the season draws to a close in September.

The cranks in Roanoke are all jubilant, and are claiming everything for their club. They say they have the greatest aggregation of ball-players ever together, and have already (so 'tis said) dug a hole for the pennant-post.

It would be to describe the enthusiasm that exists in Lynchburg. The rosters there are all rampant, and they don't believe there is another club on earth that can touch the one Smith has gotten together for the Norfolk club. Certainly, news to the Richmond rosters, now that there is not one in Richmond who does not wish to see a repetition of the race of 1894. With Richmond and Petersburg neck and neck and fighting for a place at the top, what excitement will characterize the season, and how the rosters will tremble and quake with excitement when the two clubs come together. The old-time excursions "for rosters" will be run once more, and crowds will flock both ways between the two cities.

BLUEBIRDS ALL RIGHT.

While all the other clubs have been signing new material, and fixing up gaps and weak places in their fences, the management of the Richmond club has not been idle, and the Bluebirds of to-day stand out pre-eminently fitted to do battle for the pennant of 1896.

An impartial comparison of this year's team with that of last year is certainly encouraging. At the beginning of 1896 the Bluebirds were the worst-rattled set of ball-players who ever donned uniforms, and a large majority of the patrons of the game were dissatisfied, and were cracking about the dreful results of keeping such a lot of bum players.

The same players, or many of them, remained, however, and, somehow or other, the troubles all rolled away, and all was sunshine; and those same "bum players" developed into pennant-winners, and were lauded to the skies.

Every rooster and base-ball enthusiast in Richmond knows the history of last season too well to need comment thereon, and everybody concedes now that the Richmond club is stronger now, both in fielding and batting, than it was last year at this time. Manager Wells has a staff of catchers of which he may justly feel proud; and his pitchers, as far as can be judged, are all that could be asked. They have not yet had time to harden up, and the weather has been entirely too cold to permit of their using their arms with any degree of freedom, and it would be an injustice to them to pass judgment upon them yet. Wells feels quite confident that they will all give good accounts of themselves, and he is certainly entitled to a full share of the confidence of the rosters.

NATIONAL LEAGUE OPINION.

The National League teams, who have been through here, together with the newspaper-men, who have been travelling with them, all agree that the Richmond team is the strongest fielding team in the Virginia League, and many of them say it is the fastest team in the South.

Manager Seale, of Boston, speaking of

and is not being assisted by partial umpiring."

Manager Hanlon, of Baltimore, was also quite enthusiastic over the Bluebirds, and said he considered Tannehill and Gilpatrick the fastest youngsters he had ever seen.



GEORGE GILPATRICK.

had ever seen. The opinions of such men as Hanlon and Seale are worthy of consideration, as they know base-ball thoroughly, and know good players when they see them.

A PEEP AT THE MEN.

Let's take a look at the Richmond club as it is to-day, and see what the prospects of winning the pennant really are. Start behind the bat, with Boland. He is rapidly getting into shape; has a good arm; throws accurately, and seems to know his business. He wields the bat with great accuracy, and runs the bases exceedingly cleverly.

Weldon's work is very encouraging. He has one of the best arms ever seen in a minor league catcher, and his throwing to second base is simply grand. He wields the stick, too, with a refreshing brilliancy, and he keeps his wits about him all the time. He is certainly a stayer. Meyers is a youngster as yet, but he is doing good work. He has the making of a good ball-player in him, and with a little more confidence in himself, will make a first-class catcher.

In Richmond's pitching department, Tannehill is, of course, the star, but he is not the only one. There are others. Gilpatrick knows how to twirl a little bit, and if he don't make a record as a pitcher, he will be a great surprise to many who have seen him toss the sphere. Dillon is another clever twirler, and he will, no doubt, prove a stayer, and Ames is too well known to need any question being raised as to his staying ability. His speed is worth keeping him for, if he used no art in his twirling. Taken as a whole, Richmond has a quartette of pitchers on whom Jack can rely at all times.

THE INFIELD.

The infield appears to be as quick as need be, though at times the work is rather sluggish, though, of course, this will be remedied with warm weather. Jake's work on first base is all that could be desired. He can better coach the team from that position than he can from the bench, and he has apparently gotten his eye on the ball again, and hits it out nicely.

Sweeney, on second, does not suit some of the cranks, and he will have to do better work than he has done at times if he wants to stay on the team, but he has shown that he has the stuff in him, and that he knows how to play ball. With a little encouragement he will develop into a first-class second baseman.

Nobody could fill the shoes of the old cranks, except Harry Berte, and he looks after his territory to the queen's taste. He is one of the fastest short-fielders in the business, and will do great work for Richmond this year.

Pender, on third, is a running mate for Berte, who will do much toward winning the pennant for Richmond. He has already won the hearts of all the cranks. In the outfield, Richmond is exceptionally strong, and the same can be said of Wood, Groves, and Kain. They are quick on their feet, accurate on judging flies, and understand how to pick up grounders. They will throw with great force, and with much accuracy, and will be a great help to the team.

Individually and as a whole, the Richmond team is a good one, and it is to be hoped that the rosters will stick by Wells and his Bluebirds, and do everything in their power to encourage them on pennantward. They are out for the flag, and predictions to the contrary notwithstanding, and with a little encouragement they will get it.

PETERSBURG IS STRONG.

And Will Make a Good Showing This Season.

PETERSBURG, VA., April 10.—(Special.) That Petersburg has a ball team that will make a good showing in the coming contest for the championship of the Virginia State League is conceded by all the rosters and fans who have watched their

team.

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city. They work together like a clock, and play quick ball.

Keefe, on first, will make a name for himself this year, as he is covering that bag like a veteran, and is hitting harder than ever before.

Sholta is an ideal second-baseman, and covers more ground than the majority of people who attempt to play this bag. He is a good hitter and bunter, and a lightning base-runner.

Breen, who will manage the team, is on third base, and is filling that position to the satisfaction of everybody. He is stopping everything that comes in his reach, and his throwing to bases has never been equalled in this city.

Dundon, at short, is a wonder, and his playing of this position is the position to most critical of everybody. He is quick on his feet, a sure thrower, and bats like a fiend. He is the general favorite of the fans, and he will not disappoint them.

THE OTHER PLAYERS.

George Kelley, of last year's Norfolk team, will play left. As that is Kelley's third year in the Virginia State League, he will be remembered by all the lovers of the game.

Mike McCann, who will play centre-field, is a brilliant fielder and good hitter. This is his first year as a professional, and he is sure to make a success.

Alex. Brodie will play in right-field, and be general utility man. Brodie is now playing the game of his life. His fielding is all that his friends could expect, while his batting far exceeds their most sanguine expectations.

James Powers, the substitute catcher, has been unwell ever since his arrival in the city, suffering from cold, which has affected his eyes. He is under treatment at present, but expects to be all right before the league games open. He comes from Canada, and is highly spoken of by the papers.

LYNCHBURG SATISFIED.

Her Players are Young, Enthusiastic, and Ambitious.

LYNCHBURG, VA., April 11.—(Special.)—From what the Lynchburg fans have seen of their new ball team they feel well satisfied that the Tobaccoists will take their place with the best of the league this season. The players, while they have all had experience in professional ball playing of from two to six seasons, are young, enthusiastic, and ambitious. They have records which give assurance of their capabilities, and every man of them seems to be animated with a desire to do his utmost for the success of the club; and they all realize that there is more glory in playing in pennant-winning than in "tail-ender" company.

It may be set down pretty confidently that Lynchburg is strong at every position in the field. The great subject of interest is the pitching department, not only because it is the most important, but because it is that of which the spectators have so far had least opportunity of forming an estimate. This is because Manager Smith has very properly retained the pitchers from overexertion during the short season of practice. But

JAMES LITTLE, CAPTAIN.

There is little doubt that the club will have the strongest staff of pitchers it ever started out with.

W. T. McFarlan, of last year's Texas league, gives every promise of being a prize. He is of heavy build, weighing 185 pounds, looks like a winner, has speed, curves, and good control, besides being apparently cool at all times. His batting record is 35. Roy Evans, from the West, is another one who has the stuff in him to beat and who has a splendid record. For Emporia, Kan., last year he won seventeen out of nineteen games pitched. His batting average was .357.

O. H. Boylan is a twirler whose friends predict for him a National League berth ere long. He pitched against Cleveland in a game last year, allowing only nine hits and losing by the score of 4 to 2. His winning percentage is .500, in 1895, and had a batting average of .285.

Bruner, from Topeka, is a left-hander, with speed a plenty, who is able to put the ball over the plate and to fool the batsman. He ought to prove a valuable man.

A REMARKABLE RECORD.

Guy Wilson is a big fellow, who for the past two years has been a member of pennant-winning State league teams in the West—Nebraska and Kansas. He is said to have the remarkable record of winning last season thirty-nine out of forty-two games pitched, and playing some in the field besides.

Stultz is a gritty young Kentuckian, for whom a fine future is predicted. He can already do splendid work. He pitched a game for Boston against Louisville (National League) in 1894, and won by the score of 4 to 2.

Penn Merchant comes with an excellent record, and shows great cleverness in the field. Most of these pitchers are also good, safe hitters.

IN GOOD FORM.

Jimmy Little, of the Roanokes last season, is the captain of the team, and will play first base. Everybody knows him. Suffice it to say that, after a week's practice, he is beginning to show up in the same good form as when he covered first base for the Roanoke team, when, towards the last of last season, that was one of the best.

Catch Schabel ("Deadbird") is in better spirits and better condition than ever. Frank Fear, the other regular catcher, is a much smaller man than Schabel, but is strong behind the bat and is a beautiful thrower; batting record for last season .280.

D. L. McGinnis plays second like a veteran, and has an astonishing batting record in the Blue Grass league. In five games against Knoxville last season, he made twenty-seven hits out of Davis and Hill, who have been signed by Western National League teams this year.

Joe Dolan, at third, has won the heart of every crank. He is safe, covers plenty of ground, and is one of the quickest throwers in the business.

Left-Fielder Pickering has also walked into the good graces of the fans. He is a truly great fielder, and covers every part of the left garden with apparent ease.

Short-Stop Leahy, the old reliable, is in fine form, and will play the game of his life this year from present indications. Manager Smith, who everybody here considers as good as anybody's centre-fielder, is continuing his splendid work.

In McGrew, right-fielder and substitute catcher, the club has one of its most reliable, all-round men. He is a fine out-fielder, as well as a catcher of exceptional ability, whose throwing to bases is a treat to a lover of good ball playing; and, moreover, he is a hitter who can be relied on.

One main feature of strength in the club, is the almost uniform good stick-work. Every man on the team seems to be able to hit the ball, and some of the men are stars in this line.

Take it altogether, there is every reason to expect great things from these Tobaccoists. It may be that all these anticipations will not be realized, and that the flag will not float over these hills next fall; but, if not, it will take a

mighty good opposing team to show the reason why.

ROANOKE'S HOPE.

A Much Stronger Team Than Ever Before.

ROANOKE, VA., April 10.—(Special.)—The weather has been cold and windy here, and all of the practice games of ball on the Roanoke diamond have been played under considerable disadvantage.

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